I saw a flash, then a sparkle from a moonstone

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

I almost didn't have the energy to write this post; I've been working like a dog, when I should be sleeping like a log. Moonstone though, wow! When I get home to you I find the things that you do make me feel alriiiiiight! ...I think I just broke the Cheeseometer (tm).

It's Barbarian all grown up, the cave peeps have evolved! This time round we can roam through the vertical as well as horizontal planes a la Golden Axe, and the guts are unprecedentedly bloody. I wonder if this is what we'd have ended up with if Palace had continued to release sequels to their decapitate-em-up romps.

Moonstone is a genre-bending anachronism, and therein lies its metier. It's a hacking-slashing beat-em-up for people who don't like mindless, button-mashing beat-em-ups, spliced together with an RPG for people who don't like character-leveling, grinding drudgery. Breaking with tradition, the battles require a degree of strategy and stealth, and the developmental aspects are light and frothy so as not to detract too much from the gritty, gore-laden action; more twerking than grinding really. While the premise and unadulterated slaying remain whimsical, Moonstone, remarkably, still manages to evoke a real sense of peril and urgency.

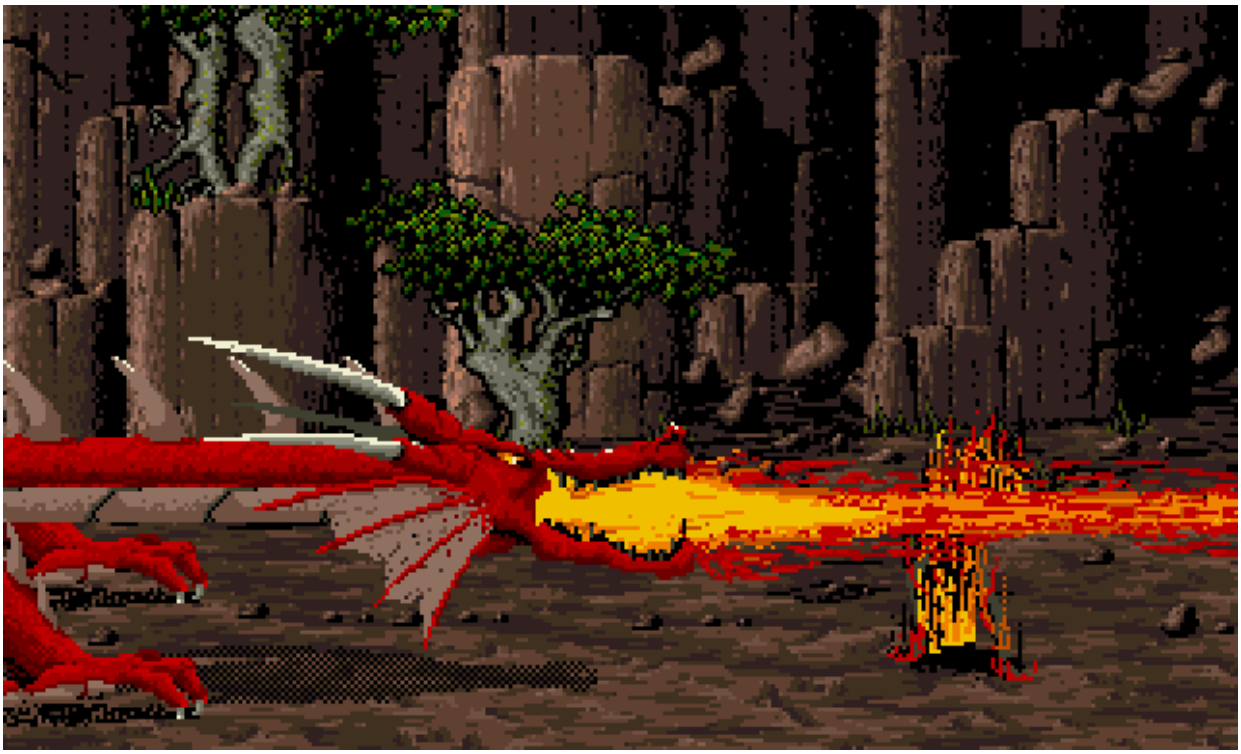
What set this apart from the competition of the era was that when you won a bout, it actually felt like an accomplishment, that your skill, ducking, diving and opportunistic swipes had brought about the defeat of your foe, rather than pure luck and joystick abuse. The enemies are tough and the fatalities they inflict often feel cheap and unfair, yet that only keeps you coming back for more, fuelling your determination to even up the score, and ultimately beat the game.

Incidentally, it's ironic that your perseverance in reaching and slaying the dragon is rewarded with an unrecoverable crash due to the publisher's lax attitude towards quality control and bug-testing before release. This isn't the only point at which the game glitches or freezes entirely, just the sure-fire crucial one that will inevitably see you hurling your broadsword at the monitor. I've read that you can find a fixed version over at the Moonstone Tavern web site these days, though I've never tried it personally.

The decapitations were largely lifted from Barbarian so weren't new, yet they seemed so much more visceral and shocking here; there's no standing on ceremony, they're as casual as supping a cup of tea on a Sunday morning. The gore, in general, is unapologetically in-your-face, and all a couple of years before the furore Mortal Kombat engendered. Looking back now it seems tame, especially compared to some of the depravity I witnessed recently in a Game Sack goriest games round-up recently. I don't pay much attention to modern gaming so I was genuinely sickened by some of these examples.

Something else that strikes you as you progress through the game is the sheer scale of the sprites. Some of the adversaries tower above our diminutive knight, literally breaking the confines of the screen, and their weapons alone can dwarf them in some cases. As if that wasn't enough, the sense of unease imbued by this motley crew of unearthly beasts is perfectly complimented by wile graphical illusions

such as the jolting screen-shake effect whenever, for instance, a troll delivers a crushing blow with its tree trunk.



At the time, games were hampered by graphical and processing limitations which brought about a gaping chasm between artists' imagination and what could feasibly be executed on screen. I like to think this game did its bit to close that gap, and it certainly blew me away at the time.